

The Inner Resources of Emotional Fitness

Our lives are inspired by people who have endured catastrophic life experiences and emerged the victor, rather than the victim. Helen Keller, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Elie Weisel are some of the more familiar names, but many of us have personally known individuals who have come through the other side of a wrenching experience with grace and humility.

If we could ask each one—the famous and the familiar—“What got you through your crisis?” in all likelihood the responses would be similar. One by one, they would describe inner resources that enabled them to survive. These are the qualities Brian Luke Seaward, author of *Stand Like Mountain, Flow Like Water*, calls “the muscles of the soul.” Courage, faith, humor, patience, compassion, imagination, humility, forgiveness, intuition, creativity, optimism, honesty, and love.

It is in exercising these muscles that the health of the human spirit is maintained. And the fitness of the spirit is vital to our total well-being.

With the understanding that there is a definitive link between stress and disease, and a greater appreciation for the healing power of the human spirit, practitioners in all areas of health are beginning to acknowledge that to be healthy, one must acknowledge and nurture the human spirit.

Here are seven suggestions Seaward offers to enhance the health of the human spirit.

1. Self-Renewal—Self-renewal is a continual process. To be present and attentive to those around us and strong for others in times of need, we must first attend to our own capacity of strength and endurance. Typically this begins with some aspect of the centering process, going within to calm and replenish.

2. Sacred Rituals—We attribute

specific habits and various customs as more special than others, then gravitate toward these activities and make them routine so we are reminded of life’s sacredness. Special readings or meditations in the morning, witnessing the sunset at night, regular meetings of certain groups to which we belong—all manner of activities can serve as a constant reminder that we are connected to something greater.

3. Forgiveness—Every act of forgiveness is an act of unconditional love. For forgiveness to be unconditional, you must be willing to let go of all feelings of anger and resentment. We forgive others and we forgive ourselves.

4. The Shadow—Embracing the shadow means to acknowledge negative, judgmental thoughts, and send a message of acceptance and compassion to that part of ourselves where these thoughts and perceptions originate.

5. Faith—The power of faith requires balance. It is good to remember that “We are given no task too great to bear.” Faith is there to guide us through moments of turbulence.

6. Joy—Living your joy is seeking and appreciating life’s beautiful side. It reminds us to live in the present moment rather than become immobilized by that which is past or that which is yet to come.

7. Compassion—Compassion in action can be explained in one word—service, and service offers a dividend of love to all parties involved.

In times of change, or when the ebbs and flows of life challenge us, it’s good to remember that our inner resources can be called upon to help us navigate each situation so that we can come through the victor, rather than the victim. *

10 Ways to Befriend Insomnia

Time never passes more slowly than when insomnia joins us in our beds. Sleeplessness can have both physical and emotional roots. Health problems, what we eat or drink, stress or depression can get in the way of a peaceful night’s rest.

Below are suggestions that might help you get to sleep and stay asleep.

- 1. Structure your sleep.** Try to go to bed and arise at the same times every day.
- 2. Create a soothing bedtime routine.** Watching the news or reading the latest page-turner are not good sleep inducers.
- 3. Keep your bedroom quiet, dark and cool** and your feet warm.
- 4. Exercise during the day,** but not within several hours of bedtime.
- 5. Avoid caffeine within at least 3-6 hours of bedtime** (longer if you’re caffeine-sensitive). Nicotine, sugary snacks and alcohol can also cause wakefulness.
- 6. If you do nap during the day, limit your sleep to 20 minutes.**
- 7. If worries keep you awake, try writing your concerns down.** Also list possible solutions.
- 8. Head potential anxieties off at the bedroom door;** organize what you need for the next day.
- 9. Don’t work, eat or watch TV in bed.** Keep your sleeping place for sleep.
- 10. Cover your clock so you can’t see the time if you wake up in the night.** Knowing the sleep you’re missing intensifies the wee-hours stress. *

A Letter From

Margaret Hood Black



We all want to feel good and sense that we are not just surviving but thriving. This issue focuses on needs—needs that, when met, contribute to our overall sense of positive well-being, both physical and emotional.

We start on the front page with the health and well-being of the human spirit. Also known as “emotional fitness,” this form of well-being makes a tremendous difference in how one perceives quality of life. The article suggests seven ways to exercise the “muscles” of emotional well-being and explains how worth it that kind of “workout” is.

The Top 10 examines ways to help you get peaceful sleep—and enough of it—so that insomnia doesn’t win, night after night, while the quiz helps you determine how well you are doing in meeting the various categories of Maslow’s basic “Hierarchy of Needs.”

The article dealing with intimacy suggests a model that can be helpful in forging or renewing a closeness with others, and the back page article explores the effects of little lies, including the ones we tell ourselves. As we endeavor to improve our lives, can we afford the massive amounts of energy that lying requires?

As always, this newsletter is meant to provide food for thought along with some tools to help you build your sense of personal empowerment.

Feel free to share this newsletter. As always, don’t hesitate to call if you’d like more information about any of these articles or if you have any questions.

Are You Surviving or Thriving?

Abraham Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs” rests on the premise that the foundation for physical and psychological wellness has to do with getting certain needs met. Without basic needs filled, the focus tends toward survival, not self-actualization. Answer the questions below to determine how well your basic and growth needs are being met.



True False

Physical

- I get adequate sleep and rest.
- My basic nutritional needs are met.
- I have a place to live that provides warmth and shelter and I am physically comfortable.
- Exercise and recreation needs are met through regular routines and planned activities.
- My need for sexual expression is fulfilled.

Safety and Security

- With very few exceptions, I feel secure and safe from harm.
- There is adequate stability and routine in my life.
- I experience financial security and a sense of prosperity that isn’t based on money.
- I feel emotionally safe.
- I can expect consistency and fairness in my daily life.
- My need for meaningful work is filled.

Love and Belonging

- I feel loved—important, wanted, valued, and desirable.
- I am able to love myself as well as others.
- I have intimate or affectionate relationships with significant others.
- I have a sense of belonging in my family.
- I am able to understand others and feel understood by them.
- I have a few very close friends and a larger circle of other friends and associates.
- I am involved in communities such as clubs or teams, spiritual groups, professional, cultural or social organizations.
- Though I am sometimes alone, I don’t often experience loneliness.

Esteem of Self and Esteem of Others

- I feel competent and up to the rigors of day-to-day life.
- I live with integrity and respect for myself.
- I trust my opinions, my thoughts and ideas, and my intuition.
- I have confidence in myself and my abilities.
- My self-care includes physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of my life.
- I feel useful and I make valuable contributions to others.

Life is not lived in a straight line, “wrapping up” one set of needs and then another. Nor does being self-actualized mean everything is perfect. Rather, this quiz offers checkpoints along the way of gratification and personal growth. If you have any questions about this quiz, or want more information, please don’t hesitate to call. *

Intimacy—It's Not All That We Think It Is

The Important Connection Between Intimacy and Healthy Boundaries

Do a quick web search with *intimacy* as your keyword, and you are guaranteed to find a wide range of articles and hundreds of books offering advice on how to find and keep it, or deal with not having it. That's because few words in our language are asked to carry as much weight as *intimacy*. Peruse some of these and you'll often find confusion about just what intimacy is.

Often it is used as a synonym for sex. TV hasn't helped.

How often have you heard lawyers in courtroom dramas ask a cornered witness, "Were you ... *intimate* with the deceased?" in a tone that's clearly not asking about the level of emotional honesty and trust in the relationship!

The usual culprit is the confusion of intimacy with **fusion**, a boundary-less merging with a partner that erases differences. That kind of longing leads to the romantic inflations and disappointments that litter the path of relationships and fuel dynamics that subvert true intimacy. One partner's fear of being abandoned is countered by the other partner's corresponding fear of being engulfed.

Appoint your partner "guardian of your solitude"

The great poet Rilke advised a young friend: "It is a question in marriage...not of creating a quick community of spirit by tearing down and destroying all boundaries, but rather a good marriage is one in which each appoints the other guardian of his solitude."

Rilke's comments, applicable to all committed partnerships, point to the mutual respect and clear-eyed seeing that form the basis for genuine intimacy. It's built by going through difficult doorways: the moment of risk before bringing up a hard subject or the challenge of listening with openness to some honest feedback we'd rather not be hearing.

The importance of trust

If your relationships lack intimacy, look to see where trust has been broken; that's the hole in the fence that needs to be patched first. Ask yourself how you've contributed to the lowering of trust, not just in big ways but in the small ones that communicate our attitudes.

Are you available to listen without comment, despite strong feelings being stirred, to allow your partner to express him or herself fully? Do you attempt to elicit a fuller range of feelings? And when they're expressed, do you actually hear them or do you dispute them? Do you respond as you wish to be responded to? Do you talk when you need to? Is your feedback, even if expressing a resentment, couched in the language of "I" rather than a finger-pointing "you?"

Watch out for old baggage

Intimacy is particularly vulnerable to the unexamined influences of our earlier lives, to our search in our partners for an ideal parent, or attempts to recreate failed strategies of the past. Authentic contact with significant others can replace those fantasy aspects with the power of genuine meeting.

Check for little pockets of unconsciousness that may be blocking you or your partner from contact.

Do you find yourself sounding "just like my mother or father?" Is your partner behaving "exactly the way my ex behaved," or accusing you of doing so? Have you awoken with dreams that merge your partner with someone from your past? If so, a conversation with a therapist can often help sweep away those old cobwebs.



Know what to reveal

Writer Pat Love asks, "What is intimacy?" and then answers her own question, "Into me, see."

It's not that to be intimate you need be transparent, or that every thought, feeling or story must be shared with your partner—but intimacy flourishes in a climate in which it's safe to disclose parts of your experience that cut closer and closer to your private self.

Sometimes, though, a longing for connection can lead to disclosing too much too soon, or telling a new partner more than he or she is ready to know or needs to know. Or to opening up too much about ourselves or people close to us when discretion might be the better choice. Consider following the Rule of Three: let a disclosure come to mind three times before sharing it rather than saying everything exactly as it occurs. Those things that recur are the ones that really belong to the relationship.

Remember, time is a necessary part of the intimacy equation. The thrill and power of the first weeks of a passionate relationship encourage self-disclosure and lots of sharing, but no matter how strong the connection, some things can come to light only after trust has been allowed to build.

Rilke's advice ends with a reminder of the connection between intimacy and a healthy ability to maintain what's separate: "Once the realization is accepted that even between the closest human beings, an infinite distance continues to exist, a wonderful living side-by-side can grow up, if they succeed in loving the distance between them which makes it possible to see each other whole and against a wide sky!" *

How Everyday Lies May Be Keeping You from Growing

Lies always exact an emotional toll. They take energy to maintain and keep us from growing in ways that we need to, but may find uncomfortable.

They often have a way of backfiring, too, with one fib leading to another and ultimately “costing” us more than just energy. An inaccurate résumé may cost us a job offer, or a “touched up” image may cost us a new relationship.

Most important, lies keep us from experiencing each other’s humanity and vulnerability—and our own. The truth that we tell ourselves that moves us to improve our lives. Might you be using some of the following types of everyday lies?

Excuses

We give false excuses all the time: why we’re late, why we must refuse an invitation, why we didn’t call back, why we didn’t show up, why the work isn’t done.

What would happen if you told the truth? For example: “I just can’t muster the courage to come to your party because I know my ex and her new husband

will be there, and I’m still tender over our break-up.”

In revealing yourself to the host, you remain trustworthy and invite empathy for the real emotions of grief after the ending of a relationship.

Shifting Blame

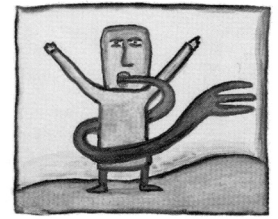
Bending the truth to avoid responsibility is rampant in personal, professional and political life. No other type of lie poisons relationships in quite the same way. And by blaming another, named or nameless, we cover up areas that we might need to work on, places in our lives that need to change for us to move forward.

Imagine the power of saying: “I’m responsible.” It’s not unusual to receive appreciation, rather than criticism, for taking responsibility.

Image Touch-Ups

Whether it’s dropping a few years from your age or creating fictional life experiences and skills, this kind of lie usually involves those things about which we’re most insecure—age, weight, education, salary, job credentials.

As we grow in our ability to appreciate ourselves and as we work with intention on



areas we wish to improve, these kinds of embellishments decline. Higher self-esteem means we don’t have to be perfect or fascinating or strikingly beautiful to be lovable.

Omitting the Truth

Lying by withholding information can be damaging to the person who is being misled. For example, not telling a prospective business partner that you are in debt could lead the person to make a decision they might regret. Putting all the information on the table honors those who are making decisions based on your information.

Lying is a draining, negative way to use our brain and skills. It demands huge amounts of emotional energy, which we’d be much better off using to improve our life. *

For more information on her services, please feel free to call: 713-562-7819.

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Margaret has two offices conveniently located
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